

Afghans kidnap 30 Pak militiamen

QUETTA, Pakistan, Mar 28: Thirty Pakistani militiamen have been kidnapped after a shoot-out with Pashtun tribesmen that left 17 people dead, official sources said today, reports AFP.

The incident occurred Thursday at Qamrudin Karez village, 220 kilometres (140 miles) north of Quetta on the border with Afghanistan, when a militia force entered the area to rescue a kidnapped comrade, the sources said.

Killed were 15 members of the Pashtun Sulaimankhel tribe and two militiamen from the frontier corps.

The sources said the troops ran short of ammunition after a heavy exchange of fire that lasted for several hours. The tribesmen then captured 30 militiamen, including a major and took them into Afghan territory.

PM threatens to crack whip if party rebels do not fall into line

Dissidents iterate pledge to oust Rao

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, triumphant after defeating a challenge to his leadership of India's ruling Congress (I) has threatened to crack the whip if party rebels do not fall into line, reports AFP.

But dissidents, pledging to take their campaign to the people, remained defiant today as they ended a hunger strike called to press for Rao's ouster as President of India's oldest political party.

Rao, 71, defeated the challenge to his leadership of the 107-year-old Congress (I) at the start of a party conference Saturday in the tourist resort of Surajkund, in the northern district of Faridabad, where the party suffered a historic split in 1969.

Loyalists rallied behind the Premier to checkmate the dissidents and passed a resolution voicing unwavering faith in his leadership.

"It is necessary for any strong and advancing army to have one commander," said Agriculture Minister Balram Jakhar, who sponsored the resolution exempting the Prime Minister from the "one man-one post" principle.

The conference also authorised Rao to nominate members to two vacant seats in the party executive, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), preempting an election dissident had been hoping to use as a trial of strength.

The rebels, led by former General Secretary Kedar Nath Singh, were shouted down and

physically stopped as they tried to protest.

Their rallying figure, Human Resources Development Minister Arjun Singh, failed to come to their rescue.

In a muted speech, Singh told Rao that the Premier's decision to nominate CWC members or hold elections — would be "binding on us."

An uncharacteristically aggressive Rao, basking in victory, sounded a stern warning to his critics within the party that enough was enough.

"I have often been accused of being soft," he said in a departure from the text of his speech to party delegates. "Now I will have to respond to what the party workers have been asking for."

"Dissidence cannot be al-

lowed to harm the party. Let me tell you humbly and categorically that after watching for several months I will have

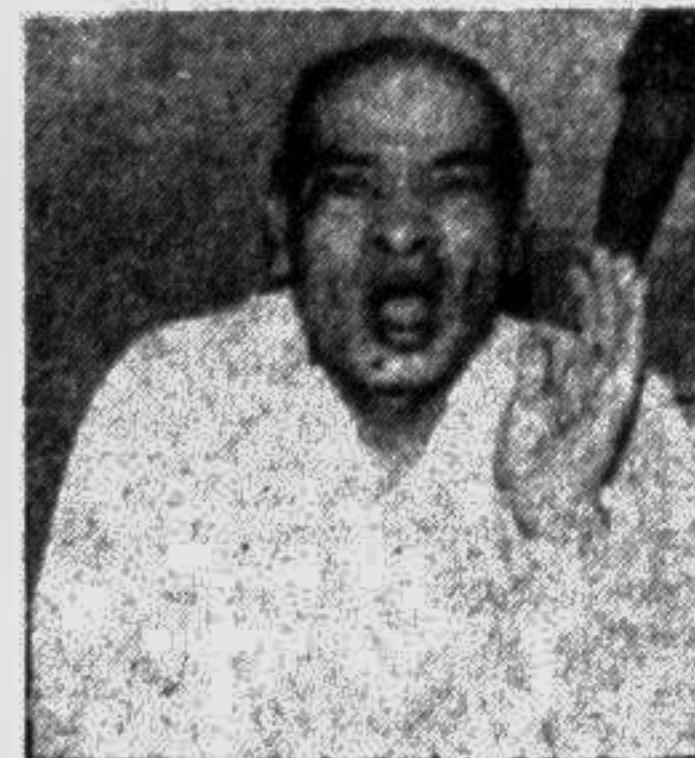
yond which "continued and motivated dissent can harm the party," and told rebels not to cross that line.

Disaffection spilled into the open after Rao's failure to prevent the December 6 destruction of the disputed Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu zealots and to staunch the ensuing Hindu-Muslim rioting.

Rao, who emerged from virtual political retirement to become party President and Prime Minister after Rajiv Gandhi's May 1991 assassination, has been accused of being soft on Hindu fundamentalists.

His critics say the Congress (I) needs a full-time President who can devote all his energy to party affairs and wage an aggressive political fight against the fundamentalists.

He said there was a line be-



to put an end to this kind of activity and enforce discipline, Rao said.

Thai army assure no coup

BANGKOK, Mar 28: None of the top commanding officers in the armed forces will stage a coup, no matter how bad the political situation, Thai air forces Commander-in-Chief ACM Gun Pimarnthip said on Saturday, reports Xinhua.

ACM Gun was speaking on the occasion of the air force's 78th anniversary. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai was present.

ACM Gun said politicians may have become overly suspicious of coup attempt simply because political differences have revealed themselves in the government, according to the local newspaper 'Bangkok Post', today.

Our only duty is to preserve the stability of the government and work in the public interest. Politics is the business of politicians, ACM Gun said.

BRIEFLY

Russian FM meets EC team: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev met in Moscow Saturday with an EC delegation composed of the three foreign ministers from Britain, Denmark and Belgium, reports Xinhua from Moscow.

After the meeting, Danish Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen told reporters at a press conference that the European Community completely supports President Boris Yeltsin in his policy.

Kozyrev said at the same press conference that the Russian government supported by Yeltsin has been and still will be predictable and reliable. It will maintain the partnership with the West and the EC as well.

Earthquake shakes Delhi: An earthquake of moderate intensity shook Delhi and its nearby areas in the early hours Sunday causing panic among the residents. There is no report of any casualty, reports PTI from New Delhi.

The tremor having an intensity of 3.5 on the Richter Scale lasted for about 20 seconds making residents rush outside for safety and shook the high rise buildings.

Meteorological department sources said that it was of local origin and the epicentre lied 40 kilometre north-west of Delhi.

US children need better edn: The Rev Louis Farrakhan warned Saturday that all Americans will suffer if the United States does not provide better education for its children, reports AP from Detroit.

Farrakhan spoke to more than 2,000 people who jammed the Mackenzie High School auditorium in Detroit as part of the fourth annual Saving the African-American Male conference.

"There was a time when Wall Street was the financial capital of the world. Now it's Tokyo," Farrakhan said. "Something is happening. The country is heading down. The only way the country can be stopped from heading down is a better system of education."

The Nation of Islam leader said much of the responsibility for saving young black men lies with black families.

Fundamentalists kill Cairo cop: Muslim extremists killed a Cairo police officer with a time-bomb Saturday, the second police officer slain in 24 hours as extremists stepped up their campaign of terror in the heart of Egypt, reports AP from Cairo.

Extremist violence spread to Cairo in January from Assut, the southern stronghold of militant Muslims who want to overthrow the secular government of President Hosni Mubarak. Saturday's explosion was the third in Cairo in a month and brought to 55 the number killed this year by militant-sponsored violence.

The shift of extremist attacks to Cairo has unsettled many Egyptians, who refer to the capital of 15 million people as "Miser, Arabic for 'Egypt.' It also strikes at the core of Egypt's vital tourism industry, which has already suffered because of attacks in the south.

Fresh fighting over Nagorny-Karabakh

MOSCOW, Mar 28: Armenia and Azerbaijan plunged into a new round of warfare Saturday over the disputed Nagorny-Karabakh region, with both sides reporting heavy shelling and many casualties, news agencies said, reports AP.

Nagorny-Karabakh officials claimed that Azerbaijani forces pounded villages in the enclave on Friday in preparation for ground assault on Saturday, the Interfax news agency said. It said fighting was fiercest Saturday in the Kelbajar and Mardakert regions of Nagorny-Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani Defence Ministry claimed in a separate statement that Armenian forces had started the assault by shelling Azerbaijani villages outside the territory, Interfax reported.

UNITA rebels appeal for food

LUANDA, Mar 28: UNITA rebels made an urgent appeal for food and medicine for civilian survivors of a two-month battle that killed thousands of people in Huambo and left the city in ruins, and UN officials on Saturday planned an immediate relief flight, reports AP.

The appeal was made late Friday by UNITA spokesman Jorge Valentin to UN Special Representative Margaret Anstee, said UN spokesman Peter Scott.

Anstee met with directors of the World Food Programme, UN Development Project and UNICEF in order to plan a flight for Monday, subject to clearance by the government, Scott said. He refused to say whether the government had approved.

However, some question marks still surround the 66-year-old Jiang who now seems firmly installed as patriarch Deng Xiaoping's eventual successor.

Jiang, an uncharismatic bureaucrat, was elected President Saturday by the National People's Congress, or parliament, taking over from the 86-year-old Yang Shangkun who stepped down.

Jiang is China's fifth President and will retain the titles of party general secretary and chief of the armed forces.

Despite Jiang's trilateral position of influence, the real



Russian President Boris Yeltsin waves to people in the street as he goes for a short walk in the centre of Moscow Saturday after the end of the second day of the extraordinary Congress of People's Deputies.

Suspects in WTC bombing claim responsibility for attack

NEW YORK, Mar 28: The suspects in the World Trade Centre bombing claimed responsibility for the attack in a letter which said the motive was deep resentment over US policy in the middle East, the New York Times reported in Sunday editions, reports Reuter.

The newspaper said law enforcement officials had determined that the letter, from a group calling itself the Liberation Army Fifth Battalion, was authentic.

The newspaper said it received the letter four days after the February 26 blast,

which killed six people and injured more than 1,000 others. The newspaper turned the letter over to law enforcement officials.

The letter said more attacks would follow unless the United States met demands, including an end to diplomatic relations with Israel and interference with Middle Eastern countries' internal affairs.

The letter described deep resentment over US policy in the Middle East and warned of additional actions against US civilian and military targets, including so-called nuclear targets.

Excerpts from Yeltsin's speech

UNDATED, Mar 28: Excerpts from President Boris Yeltsin's speech, according to AP.

There have been enough violations of the constitution, for a young state such as ours, by the government, by the president and by the Constitutional Court. That is why it is not fair to blame only the president for doing it. ... All three branches of power allowed this crisis to happen. Accordingly, all three branches must answer.

I agree with you that, of course, certain changes need to be made. ... But I did not speak about a coalition government. I did not speak about a government of national accord. I do not know what a government of national accord is. A government that would enjoy absolute trust of all people? It seems that it would have first to work to earn popular trust. ...

The American people must know that their civilians who got killed are not better than those who are getting killed by the American weapons and support, said the letter, which the newspaper reprinted along with a photo of the envelope.

There is no question that the letter was prepared by a member of this cell," a senior investigator told the newspaper, referring to the five suspects being held in the case.

All five suspects arrested by US authorities in connection with the blast are Muslims from the Middle East and are believed to be followers of radical Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman. The cleric, who is facing deportation, preaches violence against the Egyptian government from his base in Jersey city, New Jersey.

Former Italian PM charged with Mafia activity

ROME, Mar 28: Former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti shook the Italian political world on Saturday by announcing that he was under formal investigation for suspected Mafia activity, reports Reuter.

"I am deeply distressed but not surprised," he said of the warning from magistrates in Palermo, capital of the Mafia's stronghold in Sicily.

Andreotti, 74, seven times prime minister and a towering figure in post-war Italian politics, is the most senior politician to become embroiled in the country's year-long corruption scandal.

The news set his many enemies crowing and sent a shiver through an already badly shaken establishment.

"I hope the magistrates act responsibly," said Ombraetta Pumagalli Carulli, of the cham-

ber of deputies anti-Mafia Commission.

"This is a very serious charge and, if used lightly against politicians of international standing, could have devastating effects on the country's image."

Foreign Trade Minister Claudio Vitalone described the probe as "an attempt to destabilise society by giving credence to poisonous theories."

Both MPs are members of Andreotti's Christian Democratic Party. Neo-fascist leader Gianfranco Fini, a determined foe, said the news marked "the end of a regime."

Andreotti announced that he was under suspicion in a statement released by his former press attache Stefano Andreatto.

"Both in government and personally I have taken steps

Diplomats from 3 more states return to Kabul

KABUL, Mar 28: Poland on Saturday sent back its diplomats to find out whether it's safe to return to the battered Afghan capital and reopen the embassy, reports AP.

Earlier this week, Indian and Turkish diplomats returned to Kabul to gauge the chances for a durable peace in a city divided among the warring rebel groups that replaced communist rule and have been struggling for nearly a year to establish a government.

Only five of about 40 embassies — Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, North Korea and the Palestine Liberation Organization — still operate, but only with skeleton staffs.

The rocket and mortar attacks on Kabul and its devastated suburbs stopped Tuesday for Eid-ul-Fitr, the three-day celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

Deng reigns China behind the scene

important decisions.

Jiang's situation invites comparison with that of Mao Zedong's successor Hua Guofeng, who took over as China's supreme leader following Mao's death in 1976.

Hua's term at the top of the Chinese leadership lasted a mere two years before he was toppled in 1978 by Deng who opened China to the outside world and launched his economic reform policies.

Now a largely forgotten and insignificant figure, Hua serves as an NPC deputy. While the Chinese press ignores Hua, the journal for the elderly, published an article Wednesday on the former leader saying he does calligraphy daily.

Many observers saw the article as sending a cautionary

signal to Jiang about the precarious hold on power of a man propelled into the forefront of China's political scene only four years ago.

Since Jiang was elected party chief in 1989 following the political demise of his disgraced predecessor Zhao Ziyang, he has done little to foster the image of a great leader.

While Deng is alive, Jiang is assured of holding onto his three posts, a high-ranking European diplomat said.

However, unlike Hua who had to contend with Deng, Jiang faces no clear rival for the supreme leadership, at least in the immediate future.

Nevertheless, as head of the powerful Central Military Commission, Jiang needs to

confirm his legitimacy as army chief to the three million members of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).

While his predecessor as head of state Yang Shangkun



Deng Xiaoping confirm his legitimacy as army chief to the three million members of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).

Off the Record

Such stories are concocted

MADRAS: The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and AIADMK General Secretary, Jayalalitha, Sunday said her party would not have an alliance with any movement that worked against the interests of the minority communities, reports PTI.

In a statement issued as a rejoinder to the DMK's general council resolution that the AIADMK government was giving shelter to communal parties in the state, she said the AIADMK did not require the support of any national party.

Denying that the AIADMK was heading for an alliance with the BJP, she said such stories were concocted by her political enemies based on her meeting with the BJP leader, LK Advani. There was nothing unusual in her meeting a leader who did not belong to a friendly party.

'Always open' wasn't open to them

NEW YORK: More than 30 years since black students seeking equal rights sat in at a lunch counter in North Carolina, a new generation is suing some restaurant chains over discriminatory treatment, reports AP.

Allegations of racist treatment of black patrons, a galvanizing factor in the civil rights movement, have resurged recently in discrimination complaints against Denny's and Shoney's restaurants.

In California last week, 32 mostly black customers said in a federal class-action lawsuit that the Denny's chain, which advertises itself as "always open," wasn't open to them.

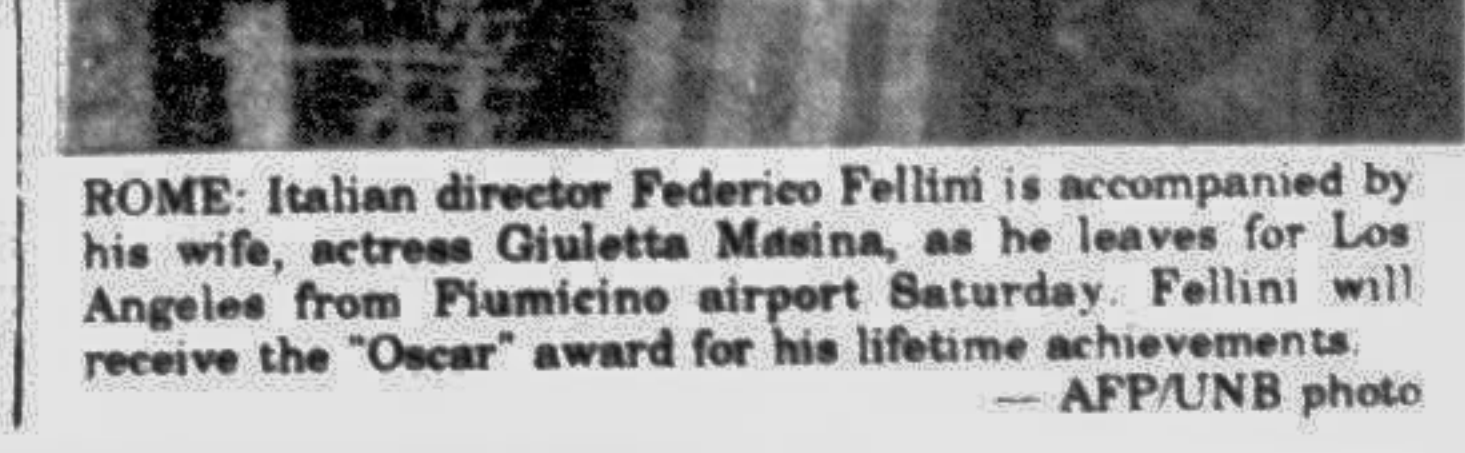
They said Denny's outlets in San Jose forced them to pre-pay for meals or pay cover charges, denied them advertised free birthday meals, subjected them to racially hostile comments or asked them to leave.

Beware while hearing sex sins

VATICAN CITY: Priests should strive to avoid making confession "painful" for sinners and should be especially delicate when it comes to sins involving sex, Pope John Paul II advised Saturday, reports AP.

The sacrament of Penance isn't and should not become a psychoanalytical or psychotherapeutic technique," the pope said in a speech. "Still, a good psychological preparation, and in general, in the human sciences, certainly permits (the priest) to better penetrate in the mysterious sphere of the conscience," John Paul said.

He urged priests to make sure confession of sins by Catholics doesn't become "loathsome or painful," and advised "delicacy about materials dealing with the Sixth Commandment," which forbids adultery.



ROME: Italian director Federico Fellini is accompanied by his wife, actress Giuletta Masina, as he leaves for Los Angeles from Fiumicino airport Saturday. Fellini will receive the "Oscar" award for his lifetime achievements.

Algeria severs diplomatic ties with Iran

ALGIERS, Mar 28: Algeria has severed diplomatic relations with Iran and recalled its ambassador from Sudan, accusing both countries of backing Muslim fundamentalists battling against the Algerian government, reports AP.

The government took the action because of interference by these countries in Algeria's internal affairs and for their declared support of terrorism by fundamentalists in Algeria, according to an official communiqué Saturday.

Algeria has been plagued with attacks by fundamentalists who went underground after the government scrapped elections in January 1992